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AUTHOR Hengesbach, Theodore W.
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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was administered to determine the needs of external degree students in the South Bend, Indiana University External Degree Program. The results (48% response rate) were compared with those of an earlier study with Northwestern New York postsecondary students. It was found that 50% of South Bend students, as compared to 27% of the New York students, were between twenty-nine and forty-three. Although both samples were predominantly white, the number of black students in the external program was twice what could be expected from South Bend local and school population ratios. Forty-eight percent of the South Bend group, as opposed to 20% of the New York group, received initial program information from print media. In examining the South Bend group alone, it was found that most of the students were between twenty-nine and fifty-five, were in a phase of reappraising their life, were most likely working, and had a yearly family income of over \$15,000. The female student's personal income was often severely limited. Main student criticisms revolved around two concerns: lengthy procedures in granting self-acquired competencies; and a special mathematics course requirement. In addition to responding to these criticisms it is recommended that the university hold business office hours after five o'clock and possibly on Saturday/Sunday and provide greater counseling services. (CSS)

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ADULT STUDENT NEEDS
AND
UNIVERSITY RESPONSES

by

Theodore W. Hengesbach, Ph.D.
External Degree Programs
Indiana University at South Bend

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Introduction

This is a report on the results of a survey questionnaire of persons enrolled in Indiana University's External Degree Programs at the regional campus in South Bend. The report documents the special needs of these students and provides recommendations for an appropriate university response.

The instrument used is a modification of a questionnaire developed by Dr. George Nolfi for the State of Massachusetts and employed by Robert Nurnberger in his study of post-secondary education needs in Northeastern New York State. Statistics compiled by Nurnberger in 1973-1974 are used for comparison purposes with our own population.

The survey was mailed to all students admitted to the External Degree programs at South Bend--a total of 189. 91 students responded (48%). This included 49 of 91 females (53%) and 42 of 98 males (42%). The high return rate indicates a keen interest by the students in the program. They realize that this is a new and innovative venture and feel they can play a part in its development.

The External Degree Programs offer both associates and bachelors degrees in general studies. There are no specific course requirements but there are area requirements in the Arts & Sciences. Students can also gain credit for learning from life experience. The degree program is designed especially for the adult student and at South

Bend the average age is 36.5. The degree has been offered at South Bend since May, 1977.

This survey was conducted to discover student reaction to the program after one year of operation and to determine student needs and expectations more accurately with the view to improving university responses to these needs.

In this report I will

- 1) Sketch the results of the survey giving notice to any strong differences between the South Bend and New York populations.
- 2) Give a student profile and suggest appropriate university responses.

1) Student Needs: The Survey Results

A) There is a marked contrast between the South Bend and New York populations as far as the age of the students is concerned. Almost 65% of the New York students were under 30 compared to 20% of the South Bend students. Also 10% of the New York students were over 44 compared to 30% in South Bend. 50% of the students in the External Degree program are between the ages of 29 and 43 compared to 27% in New York. The External Degree program is serving a truly non-traditional student market, at least as to student age. And contemporary research regarding adult life cycle tasks can assist in the understanding of the special needs that the adult student brings into the university. Over 75% of the South Bend students fall between the ages of 29 and 55.

By using the following chart¹

¹From chart prepared by Vivian Rogers McCoy, Director, Adult Life Resource Center, University of Kansas. (1977)

		<u>male</u>	<u>female</u>
Reappraisal Catch-30 29-34	1. Search for personal values. 2. Reappraise relationships. 3. Progress in career. 4. Accept growing children. 5. Put down roots, achieve "permanent" home.	26%	22%
Midlife Reexamination 35-43	1. Search for meaning. 2. Reassess marriage. 3. Reexamine work. 4. Relate to teenage children. 5. Relate to aging parents. 6. Reassess personal priorities and values. 7. Adjust to single life.	31%	22%
Re- stabilization 44-55	1. Adjust to realities of work. 2. Launch children. 3. Adjust to empty nest. 4. Become more deeply involved in social life. 5. Participate actively in community concerns. 6. Handle increased demands of older parents. 7. Manage leisure time. 8. Manage budget to support college-age children and ailing parents. 9. Adjust to single state.	21%	30%

it can be seen that these students are concerned with the tasks of reappraisal, reexamination and restabilization of their lives.

Note especially the periods 35-43 and 44-55. Over half of the males and of the females fall into these stages of life with a higher percentage of males engaged in mid-life reexamination and a higher percentage of females in the stage of restabilization. These students' desire to gain a college degree must be seen within the context of these genuine and serious tasks of reexamination and restabilization.

B) Ethnically both in the South Bend and New York populations,

participation in post-secondary education programs is overwhelmingly white. Nevertheless, the number of black students in the External Degree programs is twice what might be expected given the ratios in the general local population and in the general student population at IUSB and it is 4 times as great as in the New York population. A profile of the black respondents vis-a-vis others in the External Degree program reveals that they are often in professional/managerial positions; have a higher income, are more likely to be reimbursed for going to school, have a greater interest in gaining credit for learning from life experience and for completing a degree outside the traditional university structure. Except for 1 of the respondents who is a student all are employed full time. Again as many blacks had to discontinue their college education due to lack of adequate financial resources as others in the program. The black external degree student feels competent, is financially quite successful and is highly motivated to gain a college degree for personal rather than job related reasons.

C) It is not surprising, given the younger age of the New York population, that more of the South Bend students were married 80% to 60%. Also a larger percentage of the South Bend students had responsibilities for dependents: 60% to 40%. The responses of both males and females in South Bend to these questions were about equal.

D) Regarding employment status of the South Bend students, 82% of the males and 46% of the females listed exclusively that they were working outside of the home. In addition, 16% of the females indicated that they were homemakers as well as working outside of the home. It cannot be determined exactly whether this is full time employment but since 46% did list exclusively that

they were working outside the home, it seems safe to assume that this would be their percentage of full time employed females. Furthermore of this 46%, 30% are single, 9% are married but with spouse absent and 61% are married. The external degree program in South Bend has attracted more females working outside the home (62%) than those who are exclusively homemakers (20%).

E) As to type of employment, 54% of the females were in Professional/Managerial positions as compared to 47% of the males, a statistic which by itself seems to question the stereotype of males in management and females in clerical positions. However, 16% of the females did in fact hold clerical positions to 4% of the males. When compared to the New York population, the South Bend group with 50% in professional/managerial positions stands 11% percent below. Apart from this difference, the two groups are basically similar in the other types of employment.

F) It again is not surprising that 70% of the South Bend population had total family income of over \$15,000 a year compared to 35% of the New York group which was younger with 18% living at home with parents compared to 2% in South Bend. What is significant however, though not unusual, are the differences in income that exist between males and females in the South Bend group. These differences are revealed when personal not total family income is compared. The total family income is about equal for both males and females and it is adequate to support returning to school. But 16% of the females reported no personal income in 1977. No males did so. 30% of the females and only

5% of the males had personal incomes under \$5,000. On the other end of the spectrum 36% of the females had a personal income of \$10,000 or more compared to 82% of the males.

These statistics are significant when it comes to efforts on the part of the university to attract more females into its programs. Most females do not have the kind of personal income to support a decision to return to school. This problem becomes especially acute when it is realized that only 14% of the females currently enrolled in the External Degree Programs are being financially reimbursed for going to school and then by private employers. This compares to 40% of the males who are being reimbursed over half by private employers and 41% by veteran's subsidy.

What is uncovered here is a Catch 22 situation. Generally, men have more personal income and more financial aid opportunities. Women, on the other hand, have severely limited personal income as well as fewer financial aid opportunities. A woman must certainly feel "caught" and the university is "caught" as well. There seems to be no way out at the present time.

G) I mentioned that 41% of the males were receiving veterans subsidy. No female is receiving this subsidy. The total percentage of males who served in the military is 66% as compared to 4% of the females. Besides the financial aid benefits allowed veterans there is the added feature that veterans who have served 1 year or more receive a fairly automatic award of 6 credits toward their degree. Quite often veterans also receive additional credit for having taken special courses while in the service. These credits are important especially for the part-time

student. In the External Degree program 50% of the males and 40% of the females are taking 6 or more credits per semester while 20% of the males and 50% of the females are taking 3 credits a semester.

H) This brings us to the survey results bearing most directly on the External Degree program at South Bend. There is a marked contrast between the South Bend and New York populations in regard to where they first heard about their respective educational programs. 33% of the South Bend group answered that they received their initial information through their own personal search of schools in the area compared to 48% of the New York group. 46% of the South Bend group received initial information through the print media - brochures and newspaper compared to only 20% in New York. Another 20% received information from family, friends or at work.

I) A question of special interest concerns the reasons why persons chose the External Degree Program. The options and the responses are as follows:

Male Female

2%	10%	(1) an associate's degree is possible
42%	36%	(2) flexible degree structure (i.e. greater freedom to select courses according to interest or need.)
23%	29%	(3) ability to complete degree outside the traditional university structure.
29%	21%	(4) possibility of gaining credit for learning from life experience.

65% of both males and females were attracted by the flexible degree structure - no specific course requirements although there are area requirements and the possibility of completing the degree outside the traditional university structure. 29% of the males and 21% of the females were interested in gaining credit for learning from life experience. This seems a surprisingly low percentage. (In fact of the 189 students admitted to the program 44% have expressed interest in gaining such credit). 14% of the females listed this possibility as their only reason for choosing the External Degree while 17% of the males did so.

The most attractive feature of this degree is the freedom it gives the student to develop his/her own program within certain general guidelines and outside the traditional university structure. As one person put it: "It has met my needs because the degree program I was in was requiring classes that I didn't feel would meet my future needs and they were scheduled during office hours."

J) Another significant question asks for the reasons why the student is working toward a degree at all. The options and results are listed in the following chart:

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
1. develop personal interest	23%	13%
2. complete education	13%	22%
3. to improve or advance in job	11%	18%
4. to get a new job	10%	5%
5. fulfill my desire to get degree	36%	38%
6. job flexibility	7%	2%

The responses most often given for both males and females was to "fulfill my desire to get degree." Also responses # 1 and 2 were often cited though in reverse order by males and females. These answers indicate a highly personal motivation for gaining the degree especially when the job related reasons were cited only 28% of the time by the males and 25% of the time by females. This is in strong contrast to the results of the New York Survey. Job related reasons for gaining the degree were cited 68% of the time by these students. The more highly personal motivation of the South Bend group is demonstrated through a later question in the survey which asks whether they are engaged in degree work because their employer requires it or for personal reasons. No one in South Bend indicated that their employer required it but 79% of the males and 83% of the females chose the answer "I feel it is necessary." This in contrast to the New York group who chose this answer 43% of the time.

74% of the males and 55% of the females cited only 1 reason why they were seeking the degree. The following chart indicates their response.

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Personal interest	29%	4%
Complete education	10%	29%
Improve job	10%	15%
New job	6%	11%
Desire for degree	42%	41%
Job flexibility	3%	0%

It is interesting to note that an equal number of males and females cite exclusively answer #5. But women have exclusively job related reasons for degree work 26% of the time in comparison with 19% for the males. Only 4% of the females indicate a desire to develop personal interest through the degree work compared with almost 30% for the males. It may very well be that males returning to school have a greater need to broaden their interest after perhaps a specialized or more narrow work experience, while the female who has perhaps nurtured her interests, upon returning to school is more goal and task oriented.

K) It has been said that the non-traditional student is really a rather traditional student. Questions in the survey relating to non-traditional programming elicited the following responses. 60% of the South Bend group and 73% of the New York group stated that they would not prefer to take a course with a longer class hour at each meeting, such as a full day on a weekend although 34% compared to 23% said they would personally avail themselves of such an opportunity. Generally at IUSB courses meet 2 sessions a week or 1 session a week. For over half this seems an adequate arrangement. Half of the students in both groups did not feel a need for more branch campuses. IUSB presently operates 2 branch campuses. Over half of the South Bend students feel the services are adequate but close to half would like to see more such campuses established.

In regard to an expanded home television and correspondence program, 40% as compared to 33% of the New York group said they

should be established since they felt they would be of benefit for others.

On the basis of these statistics it does seem that the non-traditional South Bend student is still quite traditional but somewhat less traditional than those surveyed in New York in 1974.

L) According to the New York population almost 80% felt there should be greater counseling services provided the students and well over half would personally use them. In South Bend this number is closer to 60% and again with over half indicating that they would personally use these expanded services.

1/3 of the students wanted help developing a long range plan for degree work. One of the students had indicated that this was especially important.

An equal number wanted assistance with course selection.

1/4 of the students expressed interest in greater assistance developing their personal portfolio for self-acquired competency credits.

One student commenting on this question stated that "help for an adult in continuing schooling is very important - a warm friendly knowledgeable counselor is like an insurance policy-there when you need it"

Related to this was the question about the most convenient time for persons to come to the university for meetings and/or counseling sessions. According to the survey the most convenient days for both males and females are Monday through Thursday. 39% of the females and 30% of the males preferred the time noon-5:00 p.m. After 5 p.m. was preferred by 51% of the males and 41% of the females. Saturday was indicated as preferable by 20% of both males and females, and 14% of the males also indicated Sundays.

M) Overall there is a high degree of satisfaction with the External Degree program. 74% feel that the program has met their needs and expectations while 22% feel the program has met them somewhat. Only 4% feel the program has not met their needs and expectations at all.

One cause for the disappointment of students with the program is the lack of direction in preparing portfolios and in the awarding of self acquired competency credits. According to one student: "problem of getting 'life-experience credit' has bugged me -- should know within 2 months if credit will be given."

Another problem concerns a special mathematics requirement in the South Bend program. This requirement is unique to the South Bend campus. In the words of a student: "only criticism I have is to suggest the possibility of removing the math requirement. I see no practical use in my case."

It is a cause of concern though not surprising that the main criticisms of the program should revolve around self-acquired competency credit and a course requirement specific to the South Bend campus.

It appears to the student that two essential features of the degree are not being adequately considered: 1) the procedures for evaluating self-acquired competencies and the awarding of credit are overdue and (2) the flexibility of the degree program has been constrained by the addition of specific course requirements.

2) A Student Profile and Suggested University Responses

A) The following profile of the external degree student at Indiana University at South Bend can be made on the basis of the survey results:

- the student is between the ages of 29-35 and in a phase of reappraisal-reexamination-restabilization of life
- whether male or female the student is most likely to be working outside the home
- the student's total family income is over \$15,000 a year
- if the student is female the personal income is severely limited
- if male, the student will very likely have served in the military and be eligible for military subsidy and academic credits
- the student received information about the educational program from some other source - the print media or personal recommendation - rather than as the result of a personal search
- the student has selected this degree because of its flexible structure and externality and feels strongly about these features of the degree
- the student is motivated to gain a degree by personal rather than job related reasons
- the student generally is satisfied with the availability of university academic programs but interested in their expansion whenever possible
- the student wants and would most likely personally use expanded counseling services.

B) I will make a few general suggestions about the ways the university needs to deal with its adult student population.

Very obviously and practically, there need to be university office hours after 5 PM to service half of the students who in our survey indicated that they could not come at another time. But should the university not also

consider a request from 20% of this group of students to offer at least occasional Saturday office hours and does a request from 15% of the students warrant Sunday office hours?

Greater counseling services should be seen as part of an adult oriented educational program. The adult student is one who must be handled with care since he or she has many deeply personal reasons for gaining the degree and is most often at a vulnerable reexamination stage in the adult life cycle. Furthermore, given the flexible structure of the external degree programs at Indiana University, each person's degree program must be almost tailor made. This is especially true when there is the matter of developing a portfolio for credit for learning from life experience.

The students clearly expect more speed in the development of procedures to award credit in non-traditional ways.

The female student is often especially caught short of funds and with skills and competencies that might but do not automatically translate into college credit. Females especially need assistance, as the title of one recent workbook puts it, to translate what you've learned as a homemaker and a volunteer into college credit.

Conclusion

The external degree programs at IUSB have grown steadily with a minimum of publicity. Adults are attracted by the flexible degree structure and requirements and the chance to accelerate their degree program in non-traditional ways. But these programs do stretch existing and often limited university resources. What this paper has shown is that the adult student does in fact have special, personal and urgent needs which must be recognized, identified and met in order to insure a fully satisfactory program.

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